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Title : Whale Watch Education: What do passengers like best?

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Student : Not Applicable

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Abstract : Although some whale watch trips may resemble documentary films in that passengers observe many whales breaching, feeding, and even engaged in "people watching", many trips are simply spent observing a few whales breathe. Passenger response to these trips is varied based on previous expectations and experience watching whales. When the goal of the whale watch is to foster environmental awareness, respect, and responsibility, it's important to understand the passengers' responses to the whales when developing an education program. I hypothesize that when whale watch trips are similar to documentaries, education plays a minor role in inspiring passengers. Their attitudes towards whales will be based on affection or feelings. When whale watches involve observing whales breathing, passenger's attitudes towards whales might be based more on cognition, or information given about the animals and their ocean environment. In the poster, I will present two years worth of passengers' responses to watching whales based on the activity, numbers and species of whales observed, passengers' previous whale watch experience, and physical aspects of the trip such as weather. (All whale watch trips were taken with Cape Ann Whale Watch out of Gloucester, MA.) If the hypothesis is true, different approaches to education should be taken on each trip depending on whale behavior, numbers and species encountered during the time spent observing whales. These various approaches will be explored as well.